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‘In and against the museum’: The contested spaces of museum education for adults

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This paper focuses on museum and gallery education for adults in Dundee, Scotland. Dundee has recently experienced a shift from being mainly working-class to an educational, cultural and tourist centre. Hence, an interesting field for the examination of the educational policies and practices of the city museums/galleries and the different fashions they receive and act upon wider developments in the museum world has emerged. Questions arising are how the new, open and accessible museum (and gallery) has changed the way education is constructed and offered in the museums in the city? What is the relationship of education with marketing and the new discourse of social inclusion and participation in museums and galleries? For example, one of the most pertinent findings was that, at least in Dundee, activity-based and individual learning has been over-valued, at the expense of a more social and dialogic educational experience that participants seemed to largely prefer and indeed propose as more meaningful to them. Although new ideas and participatory practices have improved attendance and the engagement of the local adult population, other issues, such as the new economic reality for museums and the close relationship of education with marketing are policies that were often treated with resistance, if not opposition, by the research participants.

Key words: museum/ gallery education,

‘How would you like it if we tried to compose a history?’

‘I would like nothing better. But which?’

‘Indeed, which?’

Gustave Flaubert (1976) *Bouvard & Pécuchet*

Introduction

Interestingly, museums and galleries have often been likened to a clock: even though buildings and exhibitions have retained their relatively stable and unchanging face, hidden mechanisms and the interplay of a range of curators, educators, trustees, donors, artists and architects, determine their profiles and ideological orientations (Schubert, 2000). This article focuses on a more recent development that has been

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affecting the cogs' works: the re-discovery of the 'audience'. Indeed, due to a number of demographic and cultural trends in post-industrial and post-modern society, museums and galleries have arguably been changing from relatively elitist into more audience-driven and service-oriented organisations. Amongst an array of transformations and new orientations, their educational role has been receiving increased interest and acknowledgement.

This article draws on the findings of a doctoral study (Grek, 2007) which set out to explore the reasons for, workings and impact of this change by examining the field of museum and gallery education for adults in the UK. This is a relatively under-researched topic within museum education studies – academic and other literature has focused more on children's learning in the museum. The emphasis has increasingly been on how people learn in the museum and the ways their learning can be improved. Instead, the study set out to move the research lens from examining *learning* in the museum as a *process*, into investigating museum *education* as the broader notion which involves, alongside learning, critical questions in regard to its *content* and the *conditions* under which it takes place.

Arguably, the post-modern museum has brought people closer to exhibitions than ever before; more and more visitors (and some 'non-visitors') now engage with museum displays in much more participatory ways. Nevertheless, as Flaubert might have asked, which history is selected for them to engage with? If museums have become more open and accessible to broader social groups, have they become more democratic in terms of a more collective and shared construction of history and culture? The new notion of the post-museum does not signify a building to be visited, but a plethora of transient activities to be enjoyed within and without the museum; thus, it almost moves beyond the idea of the exhibition itself (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). What is the significance and weight of collections and exhibitions in the museum 'experience'?

The study was set in a fairly small urban centre on the east coast of Scotland, the city of Dundee. Dundee was chosen as a prime example of a formerly industrial city, which has experienced the waves of modernisation and regeneration of the post-industrial economy. In particular, the research focused on the educational provision of four museums and galleries in the city, namely the McManus Galleries and Museum, the Dundee Contemporary Arts, the Discovery Point Antarctic Museum, and Verdant Works. This article will first give an outline of the study and then build on its findings in order to draw answers to the questions outlined above.

The educational provision of the museums and galleries in Dundee

Theory and methods

The study pursued two main strands of research inquiry. First, it examined the educational opportunities in the museums and galleries in Dundee, the values underlying them and the curricula that determine the pedagogical practices employed. Second, it was an attempt to investigate the impact of this provision and the reactions of the local population to it. Thus, it sought to understand what and how people learn in the museum and the factors that influence their educational experiences.

The theoretical backdrop was set by the works of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), Raymond Williams (1921-1988), and Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). Gramsci's concepts of hegemony, the role of the intellectual, and the ethical state, highlight the

importance of education and cultural struggle in challenging the limits of 'common sense'. However, Gramsci was writing primarily about the political context of cultural struggle in a different society and during a different era. His work is highly relevant but had to be strengthened by other related theoretical resources. The contribution of Williams (1961; 1973; 1981), writing from a more recent tradition of British Cultural Studies, is therefore helpful. His emphasis on 'culture is ordinary', the power of the 'selective tradition' in education and the tripartite distinction of 'dominant, residual and emergent' cultural forms has relevance for the analysis of museum visiting. Nevertheless, neither of these theorists explicitly addresses the nature of museum education and its role in wider relations of cultural power. Therefore, it was Bourdieu's work which primarily offered the conceptual apparatus for the analysis of the educational role of the museums and galleries in the city of Dundee. His focus on a 'socio-analysis' (1990) of the cultural field as a contested space of diverse forces and agencies, in addition to his overcoming of the dichotomy between structure and agency, have been the central analytical resources in the study. In particular, the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Bourdieu and Darbel (1991) provide distinctive theoretical and conceptual analyses relating to the nature of *habitus*, the social structuring of taste and the role of social and cultural capital in masking systematic class inequalities as arbitrary.

Finally, in terms of research design, in order to combine the examination of structures and agency in the museum field, the study used a mix of quantitative and qualitative tools – a 'mixed-methods' approach. The need to examine social structures, such as gender, class, education and ethnicity and how they affect participation, as well as look at habitual beliefs and common-sensical ideas and how they determine educational experiences in the museum, led to the combination of quantitative tools with ethnographic methods, such as observations and interviews. Fieldwork and interviews took place between January and October 2005.

The findings

As with other large UK urban centres over the last decade, Dundee has gone through 'a shift away from the consumption of goods and into the consumption of services – not only personal, business, educational, and health services, but also into entertainments, spectacles, happenings, and distractions' (Harvey, 1989, p. 285). The leisure-service industry and more specifically the museum and gallery sector are a significant part of this economic trend. As already discussed, the research focused on three case studies, short descriptions of which are given below:

1 McManus Galleries: Starting with the McManus Galleries, the museum's collections amount to about 150,000 artefacts and artworks, ranging from natural history, archaeology, community and social history, decorative arts and crafts and fine art. The museum is currently under refurbishment, 'the largest renovation project in [the museum's] 138 year history' (McManus, online, 2006). According to the McManus education officer, the previous lack of dedicated educational staff, in combination with the absence of any long-term planning regarding education, were reflected in the one-off educational sessions McManus offered to its local constituencies. She argued:

I think that now there is a shift towards moving education policy and educational programmes towards lifelong learning. This has reformed the role of my post for the

redevelopment. So I think it's been quite a long journey over the last four years, from just school visits to a more inclusive service. Now we work with a broader range of participants.

A combination of factors, like a more general political and social trend towards lifelong learning, as well as her efforts and aspirations as a visionary individual, contributed to the long-term desire to establish McManus as a changed museum. To an extent, the present re-development is the continuation of these efforts to present McManus Galleries as a more inclusive institution, having adapted to the calls of the times for more popular and experiential learning through and with the collections. However, according to some of the older research participants regarding their past experiences in the McManus Galleries, this was indeed the case in the past:

Yi see this place used ti be the headquarters of Dundee, everyone used ti come in here. All the bus stops were aroond. When it rained whar wid yi go? Yi wid come in here. Yi see Dundee people are great readin people. Yi see, at the days of the jute mills yi had ti come ti the lehbray, yi had to come ti the museum, because people coodna afford radios an TVs an all that. Since the wages increased, I suppose different days different things. But this used to be a very busy plais here... Ah don't know why (they don't come any more), I ponder on this, yi ken?... The centre of the toon here was packed, what they call tenements... But now they are moved ti the housing schemes, so people moved away from the centre. (L, m, 70).

However, according to a different interviewee,

Ah remember when we were young, museums and libraries were mostly for other people. If yi went ti a library yi had ti be quiet, it was kind of awesome in a way. Even the statues looked at ya when yi went in, so unless yi really had a deep interest and wanted ti read and find books an whut huv yi, yi wid never enter their doors. Ah mean the museum assistants are much better now, but then, cuz we were ordinary people – so were they of course – but they kind of had this revered attitude. (G, f, 69)

Indeed, when the museum re-opens in 2008/09, it will be a different museum for the people of Dundee. In general, examining it as a case study in comparison with the other two sites in the city is of particular interest; when the museum closed in October 2005, it did belong to the old museum tradition of the Victorian rational recreation movement, the drive for social amelioration or 'improvement' through popular education (Bailey, 1987). At its re-opening in 2009, McManus Galleries will become the cultural centre of the new, regenerated Dundee, in which, leisure and culture are playing a primary role, this time in the promotion of the city as a tourist, commercial and entrepreneurial centre. McManus Galleries is becoming an essential part of these developments, as the city's main museum, linking the history of Dundee with its present profile.

2 *Dundee Contemporary Arts*: DCA is more than what its name implies —a contemporary arts centre presenting not only cutting edge art, but also a cinema, a café/ restaurant, a Print Studio and a Visual Research Centre. It organises periodical, temporary exhibitions of contemporary art from Scotland and abroad, while offering to the local population and tourists a plethora of other activities to engage with.

DCA forms the focal point of Dundee's 'cultural quarter'. According to Wynne (1992), apart from the historical ones such as Montmartre or Soho, most of the more recently formed cultural quarters have been used as tools for urban regeneration. It is interesting to note that in all of these new cases, art does not come on its own. Within the UK, cities like Glasgow, Newcastle or Dublin (Wynne, 1996), have

successfully followed this model, by creating areas where art acts as a magnet, but comes combined with retail, entertainment and nightlife. Dundee has been developing as a similar example of a city which has been regenerated and DCA became the flagship of this new development.

In terms of the education policy, DCA's 'Education, Outreach and Interpretation Programme' comprises six separate elements: 'DCA Active', which offers artist-led sessions; 'Sunday Family Days' and taster workshops and tours for community groups and first time visitors; 'DCA Education', offering sessions for school groups; 'DCA Out and About', which develops longer term relationships with organisations and groups, including 'lengthy planning and training, tailoring approaches and materials, display of outcomes or work in progress' (DCA, online); 'DCA Film Development', offering animation workshops; 'DCA Interpretation', including gallery/ artists talks, events, activity sheets, tours; and, finally, 'DCA Online', presenting DCA's web based activity. However, according to DCA's education officer,

Education has been used as a cure to everything, to marketing, to social inclusion, access ... We have another term now, the cultural entitlement, by the Cultural Commission, everyone is entitled to culture ... The government says everyone is entitled to cultural activities The bottom line is to be able to affect individuals positively and change social attitudes. The minute you don't do that you just push people through, like teachers push pupils through exams. As long as we don't do that, then we are fine.

Dundee Contemporary Arts has renounced the old world of museums and galleries by its very name and established an open space, offering multiple leisure/learning experiences for all. However, its visitors are mainly people with high economic capital and education. DCA's educational provision is largely addressed to young people, a group traditionally given high priority in policy aimed at cultivating confident and skilled young individuals. Given the relatively small size of the city and its working class demographics, DCA represents for the Dundee students' population, business community and up-town intelligentsia one of the few spaces in the city, where they can feel part of the new, regenerated Dundee. On the contrary, other young people in the city, when asked about the DCA, do not share this view at all:

Ah think they (museums) are borin, cuz they are no wha young people are inti. It is just aboot stuff you get taught in school and history an old stuff, it is just the same... Am not really inti museums or that. An girls an boys oor age are no inti any o that. They have other things in mind, like goin oot an stuff, not really galleries.... Ah don't like pictures at all...Ah mean ah like some, like pictures with my friends from nights oot but nothin like that. (B, f, 16)

3 *Dundee Heritage Trust*: Dundee Heritage Trust was founded in January 1985 with a charitable status. Its main aim is to 'preserve and present Dundee's industrial past' (DHT, online, 2006). It is in charge of the Royal Research Ship Discovery at Discovery Point, and Verdant Works, an industrial museum presenting the history of the jute industry in Dundee. The independent status of the Trust suggests that it operates as a 'private' organisation and therefore receives limited funding from the local authorities, the government and museum organisations. It operates as visitor attraction, both keeper of Dundee's historical past and tourist magnet for the city's growing tourism industry.

The Trust's status, its funding situation and the nature of both museums as 'visitor attractions', also suggest that, apart from the locals and tourists, Dundee

Heritage Trust targets Dundee's private sector, in order to secure sponsorship. Indeed, the 'trust'-based organisational structure has been a determining factor for its provision to the local public. According to its marketing officer,

Weddings, dinners, corporate entertainment, we do anything at all, anything to make money ... Curators see Discovery as a museum, I see it as business. Their priority is different than mine ... You know, it is always like that ... There is the education side, there is the marketing side, and there is the need for good co-operation between both.

Dundee Heritage Trust represents an interesting example of the new challenge museums face, since they have been increasingly expected to marry commercial approaches with education, contribute to social inclusion, and preserve important aspects of the past. Bourdieu's notion of the field (1993) is particularly useful in identifying the contested spaces of museum education for adults; a dynamic assemblage of diverse forces occupy it, forces that can – even within a single institution – be, as Williams suggests (1973), residual, dominant and emergent. Verdant Works is a case in point; residual historical narratives in this jute history museum, although presented with the aid of the most dominant contemporary museum pedagogic tools, are being resisted by emergent oppositional voices, such as those of the research participants:

(I like) the less formal stories, I think, to hear a story from someone that has been there and worked for that industry that has plenty of stories to tell, I think that there are little things that are funny or moving than having a long sheet to read...the idea of a guide is very good because you focus more on what is being said rather than read and forget.... (R, m, 34)

Ah think you should ask the people when you make an exhibition. It is their toon, it is their histry. Put somethin in the paper, ask them how they like it to be. We should get it across to people, get it roond. It is the people's museum, it is the people's history so Ah think you should ask them. (AC, m, 35)

Education for adults in the museums in Dundee: An overview

Examining all three case studies comparatively, McManus Galleries presents a more balanced distribution in terms of its visitors' backgrounds. The old local authority museum, now closed for a two year refurbishment, used to open its doors to people from all backgrounds. The statistical data reveals that a diversity of – mainly white – constituencies were enjoying the exhibitions at the museum. DCA and the Dundee Heritage Trust present a different picture; DCA is being visited by a largely young, educated and prosperous population, whereas Dundee Heritage Trust mainly by the middle-aged or older age groups of a generally high social status.

Fig. 1. Visitors' educational background (population)

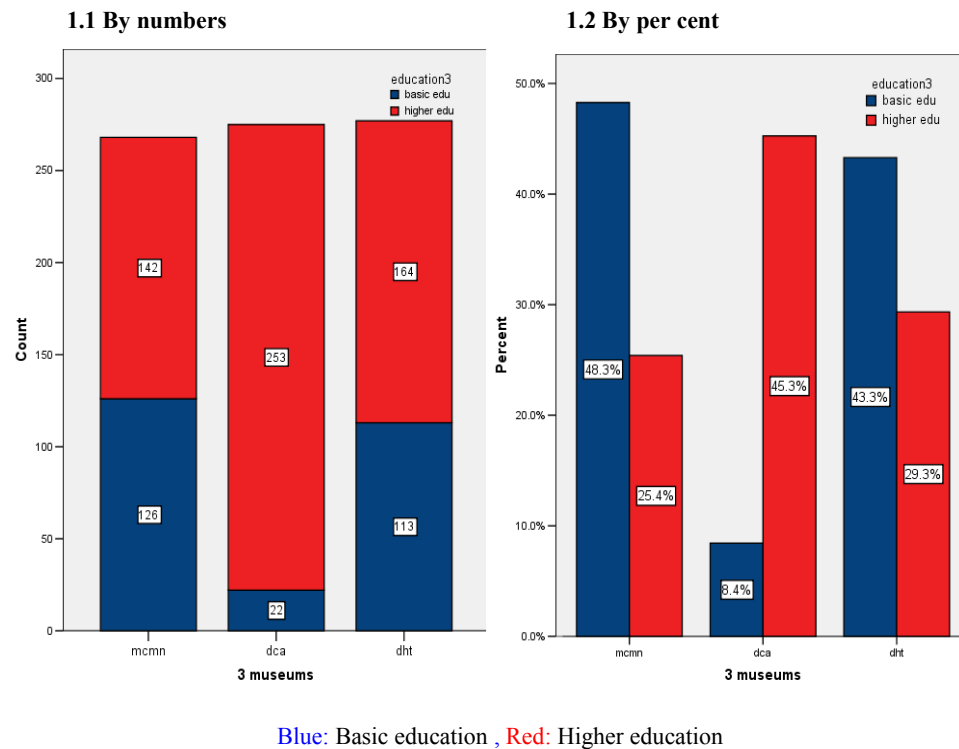


Fig. 2. Visitors' area of living

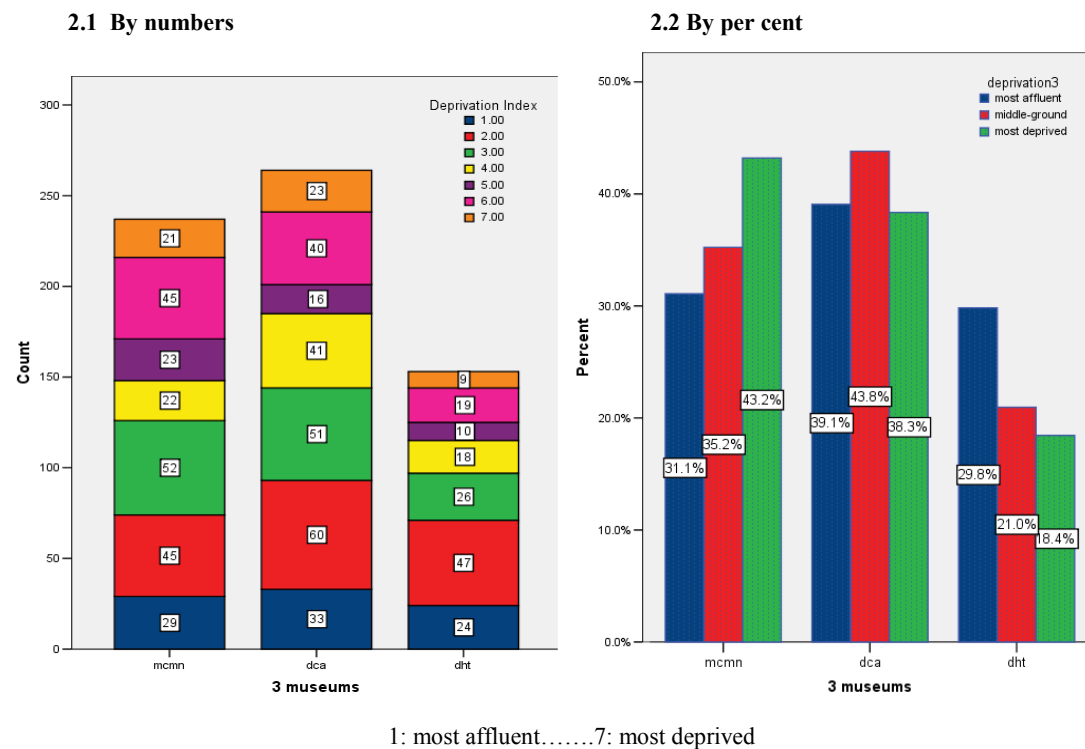
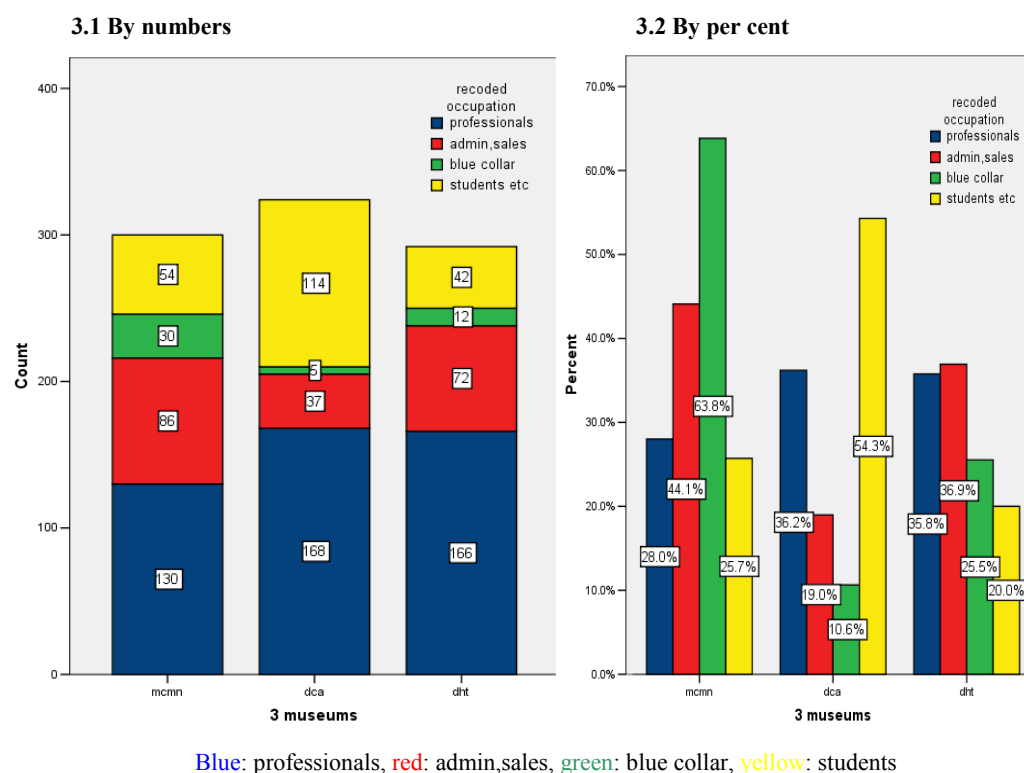


Fig. 3 Visitors' occupational groups



In the attempt to sketch out an overview of the educational provision of the museums and galleries in Dundee, a multiplicity of educational approaches was found. Education depends on the size of the museum/ gallery, its collections, the history and traditions that have developed around the specific organisation and the current agenda and staff. For example, McManus Galleries, as the main local authority museum in Dundee, has a history of over 100 years; DCA and Dundee Heritage Trust count less than 10 years of presence in the city. Further, their organisation is different, with the DCA being the brain-child of a public-private partnership, whereas Dundee Heritage has a trust status which identifies it in the category of independent/ private museums.

The organisation and funding of each different institution has an impact on the educational activities they offer; even though education is part of the public mission of all of them, for some it might sometimes become an additional source of income. However, what came out as an overall and persistent reality for all the museums and galleries investigated is the scarcity of funding for education. The education officer at the DCA, in particular, argued that demand is often high, however due to their limited resources in terms of funding and staff, the gallery often has to reduce the provision to what it can successfully organise. The McManus education officer stressed the need for partnerships across departments within the local council, or for the support of the Scottish Arts or Museum Council. Finally, the marketing officer at the Dundee Heritage Trust argued that what is seen as education and scholarship to curators, she can only see as business – otherwise both Discovery Point and Verdant Works would have to close.

These tendencies might explain the increasing association of education with marketing, to the extent that in the case of Dundee Heritage Trust it was only the

investigation of both areas that could give a fuller picture of the provision. Dundee Contemporary Arts also presented a close relationship between the departments of education and marketing, whereas it was only the McManus Galleries which did not demonstrate such close connections between the two. In fact, the old McManus did not have a marketing department at all, quite a rare phenomenon for large contemporary museums and galleries. However, the changes the current re-development will bring are yet to emerge.

To summarise, limited resources and the need to adjust to the ever-changing social, educational and funding agenda in order to sustain their work, are major factors determining the museums' educational opportunities in Dundee. In terms of pedagogy, the ideal visitor is usually constructed as the individual who will pursue independent and self-directed learning in the museum. His/ her experience has to be authentic, active and enjoyable; further, the more it fits in the learning outcomes prescribed by the museum/ gallery itself the better.

These efforts have borne their fruits. Museums and galleries in the city have become more popular than before. They offer an enjoyable experience to their visitors, far from the passive and unexciting visits of the past. All visitors are welcome; indeed, those that are less likely to visit, are even more. Visitors are encouraged to lead their visit independently, learn, enjoy themselves and, if possible, repeat their visit soon. Individual agency is celebrated in all Dundee museums, where all visitors, both traditional and non-traditional, interpret exhibitions according to their own personal frames of reference.

Similarly, all three museum education officers saw visitors as individuals with learning and leisure choices. On the other hand, they would treat non-visitors as belonging to social groups that needed to be approached and 'empowered' in order to (ideally) become, as the rest, independent visitors. Based on cultural diversity or the politics of identity, a major part of the Dundee constituencies, the one perceived as in need of inclusion, is divided into ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, gays and lesbians, people of colour, etc. The structures pervading these groups and relations of power cutting across them are left untouched. Complex realities, like context and the different degrees and forms of cultural and social capital that determine visitors' attitude towards museums and education in general, are waning in the face of the celebration of the instant, the personal and experiential. However, research participants spoke about the social dimension of learning towards collective and shared experience and action; this kind of learning for dissent is left unacknowledged and hence undesired.

Gramsci has argued in relation to the ways hegemony and power work covertly in attributing some social groups with a subordinate status. He shows the way disadvantaged groups themselves inculcate hegemonic discourses that take social position as a given and hence justify inequality. Many of the interviewees would claim that their opinion is of little value and their stories not grand enough to be part of the museum narratives; some would blame themselves for not understanding exhibitions. On the other hand, the visitors who are not seen as disadvantaged, are increasingly viewed as individuals with a diversity of private needs and preferences, rather than seen as social beings, members of communities where they possess different levels of power and authority.

Nevertheless, the locatedness of the museum educational provision within the context of a relatively small urban centre like Dundee, gave evidence of the possibilities that the post-modern museum has also opened up for alternative and oppositional readings of the dominant trends. The narratives of the ex-jute workers at

Verdant Works, or the outreach provision of the McManus Galleries are only few of the examples of work of this kind in Dundee.

Analysis: Emerging issues

Individuals, the market and the post-museum

Reflecting the more general tendencies of the post-modern museum, museums and galleries in Dundee were seen as offering better access, generated mainly through participation in learning as a pleasurable activity. Through the museums' learning offer, individuals and groups are encouraged to pursue their own meanings, or in other words, what Edwards called, *heterogeneous* goals (Edwards, 1995, p. 187); that is, visitors have a kind of learning that is more personal than collective. Instead of being passive in their reception of the museum message, visitors are supported in actively seeking their own individual interpretations of the meanings of artworks and artefacts.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is of value in understanding the ways post-modernist thought has served this discourse of valuing personal agency and individual traits and dispositions in the postmodern museum. The pre-occupation with museum visitors as the independent seekers and consumers of their own meaning-making pursuits, relates closely to the hegemonic predominance of the management of the self through exercise, learning, shopping, travel and, as we have seen, culture. The over-emphasis on the market over other areas of public life has contributed in often dealing with visitors as consumers, who have different needs and desires in the museum. The increased interest in quality assurance and evaluation of education in museums results in examining visitors as individual entities with needs and objectives, rather than people who belong in a diversity of communities and social groupings.

However, whilst museums present themselves as accessible and open for every individual, they treat visitors as undifferentiated in terms of their cultural and social capitals; offering equal opportunities to visit a museum or gallery treats people as if they start their visits on an equal plane. Arguably, in the museum quasi-markets where individualism and personal choice are the new rules of the 'game of art' (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1991), what are the benefits of trying to attract those that find it hard to play?

The market is formally neutral but substantively interested. Individuals (or institutions) come together in competitive exchange to acquire possession of scarce goods and services. Within the marketplace all are free and equal, only differentiated by the capacity to calculate their self-interest. Yet, of course the market masks its social bias. It elides but also reproduces the inequalities which consumers bring to the marketplace. Under the guise of neutrality, the institution of the market actively confirms and reproduces the pre-existing social order or wealth, privilege and prejudice. (Ranson, 1992, p. 72)

We need to think about the implications of the close proximity of education with marketing in museums in Dundee and further afield. Marketing is not a neutral tool, used only to promote museum work. It has implications for the kinds of knowledge and education that are offered in the museum. Is education a light way of spending one's time creatively or can it potentially be the practice of freedom (Freire, 1976) that problematizes and challenges visitors' pre-conceptions and museums' traditions? Even though the government modernising agenda has improved museum spaces and services in accordance with contemporary standards of good practice, it has also set museums under the all-encompassing horizon of the market economy, where values

are usually measured against costs. In this discourse, education is divided into 'hard' qualifications and 'soft' general competencies intended for flexible workers. Museum educators are asked to be merely facilitators of the learning 'process'; their educational role is in fact reduced, whereas managerial responsibilities, such as monitoring and evaluation, become more significant. Is it any wonder that often they become cynical about the over-emphasis on learning and the exploitation of education as the remedy of all museum and certain social issues, too (see also Grek, 2003)? This situation cramps the autonomy of museum educators.

It would be naïve and unhelpful not to acknowledge the difficulties of following any other route, apart from the commercial one, or to argue that marketing initiatives are all negative for education in museums. The study's findings showed how marketing techniques have assisted museum education departments in attracting a diversity of groups to museums, groups that often had no contact with museums and galleries before. In addition, in the era of speedy telecommunications and virtual realities, marketing has indeed opened the museum doors to far more people than ever before.

But techniques are different from principles and values. The increasing demands for evaluation have resulted in the prevalence of a language of numbers and outcomes over issues of educational concern. Little is left from a kind of education that discusses ethics, history, philosophy or aesthetics in the museum; even less is concerned with social issues, social struggles and political matters. I am not suggesting that this was the dominant mode of museum education in the past, of course. However, with the rise of the post-modern museum, when people rather than objects have become the central focus of museums' mission, I would argue that 'delivering' education as a matter of counting numbers and applying techniques risks missing out on the great educational potential of museums. This study produced numerous examples of the ways old narratives and hierarchies have already been translated into accessible, hands-on displays (for more extensive analysis and examples, see Grek, 2007). Nevertheless, the point in question is: should education be about more?

For many museum educators there is a political necessity to work *in* and *against* the institutions that employ them. Working *in* the museum would entail using historical and cultural artefacts in order to fight *against* the hierarchies and limitations of the 'selective tradition' (Williams, 1973) of past historical residues or the contemporary reconstitution of the visitor into customer. However, as with visitors, structural constraints are to be acknowledged for museum educational work as well. Nonetheless, this negotiation should also recognise the significance of the distinction between costs and values. In other words, what is the museum educators' political understanding of the bigger picture of the new world of lifelong learning and the market economy? What is the difference of using the realities of their professional and personal experience to enlarge visitors' vision of the world, from simply using the right language to receive the funding for the furthering of institutional benefits (see also Thompson, 2001)?

Learning, accessibility and the post-museum

As this research showed, the idea of learning as an individual enterprise is not what research participants appear to want. A 'customer-oriented' form of education disheartens and excludes those for whom the sharing of common problems and values is their perception of what education is for. At least in regard to the social dimensions

of learning in the museum, most of the participants, but museum workers too, said that it is the most valuable part of the visit. Should it come as a surprise that working-class people find museums and galleries irrelevant to their everyday lives and experiences?

I would argue that there is a shift from the old museum, the architecture of which exposed the individual to the gaze of power (Foucault, 1977) to the new, open museum, which offers diverse 'learning' choices to the active visitor/ learner. Hence, museum learning needs to be 'fun', related to curiosity and creating opportunities for new learning. Information and communication technologies are a vital ingredient of this new museum, since they are the basis of the flexible and need-orientated learning facilities – hence the emphasis on ICT.

It could be argued that the practice of learning, or learning how to learn, is one of the most significant aspects of education. However, the emphasis on *processes* rather than *purposes* suggests a reduction of education to a mere matter of means rather than ends. Indeed, it seems that as with other educational institutions preparing lifelong learners/workers, flexibility and self-directedness in the museum is of crucial significance:

Knowledge has been replaced by skills and learning. Everything which might have been seen as obtaining knowledge ... seems to have moved into an activity mode, where what is important is process. (Marshall, 1996, p. 269)

If the connection of learning in museums with the requirements for a flexible workforce seems like an argument too far, I would suggest that it is *precisely* the notion of flexibility that makes them closely relevant: the discourse about independent visitors in charge of their visit and learning in the museum is strikingly similar to the hegemonic discourse of flexible workers, managing their learning portfolio and career prospects. Individuals in the museum are encouraged to play a crucial part in the generation of knowledge for themselves. This is a 'skill for life', one of the many in the framework of general competencies necessary to 'succeed'. In turn, museum staff need to process all learning that can be made visible and tactically externalised; it is only the learning that is communicable that can be turned into an advantage (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006).

Preston argues against the over-recognition of outcomes as a proof of learning, and supports that 'this potentially de-authorises the learning of some. Their learning is of use only in that it can deliver benefits and is not necessarily of intrinsic value' (Preston, 2006, p. 167). Even though learning in the museum is for most (though not all) informal and leisure learning, the pre-occupation with planning, structuring and measuring it, reflects the hegemonic trend towards the institutionalisation of every aspect of *potential* learning people might have. The emphasis on finding the language and structures to offer a more organised 'learning experience' in the museum might therefore mean that the institutional boundaries of the museum, as a reflection of the ever-dominant hegemonic educational frameworks, 'are being redrawn rather than withdrawn' (Crowther, 2000, p. 485).

The claim of 'accessibility' of the new post-modern museum, both in Dundee and further afield, is in itself the effect of a new state of affairs, where entrance to the museum is not only allowed but assisted. Nonetheless, the 'rules of the game' of art and culture have not substantially changed. Although they have become less strict than before, they are still set by the favourite players. The notion of accessibility of certain venues for disadvantaged groups renders these groups deficient of certain

features other groups have; instead of radically changing and democratising the stories museums tell, 'non-visitors' are expected to make their own interpretations of histories that mean little to them and interest them even less. This is how boundaries, hierarchies and their reproduction are re-configured.

Such a reduced notion of education in the museum does little to change the widespread public opinion about the kinds of knowledge and interests which museums represent. The lifelong learning discourse, as the driving force behind the new post-modern museum, is the reflection and the consequence of 'the reform of the welfare, and the retreat of policy making to strategic role ... which both reflect the essentially *political* nature of the process, and the *reality* of it' (Griffin, 1999, p. 442, emphasis in original). Even though attributed to the inevitability of technological and global changes museums are part of, museum learning, like lifelong learning in general, paradoxically finds its solutions in the choices, needs and learning styles of individuals. Learning is not only the product of the museum experience; instead, learning *and* experience form a unique dynamic, where novelty, enjoyment and change can always produce new learning and new experience (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). It seems that in the new 'learning society', flexibility is the answer to the paradox of the benefits of being paradoxical:

Organisations with paradoxes will be, if they are dealt with appropriately, more effective and successful than those without. Thus, mastering contradictions is what is needed in today's management for museums. Museums need to know best how to foster, deploy and marshal people's creativity to make most of their organisational capacity and work for the benefit of society. This must be done, while they deliver services on time, keep to tight budgets, and meet regulations and statutory requirements. (Kawashima, quoted in Lawley, 2003, p. 84)

Conclusions

Instead of an education that opens up public debate on social, political and moral questions, a preferences and lifestyles discourse has been introduced to museum education. According to this, museums have become more democratic on the basis of addressing people's individual needs. However, the inequality of the structural conditions under which 'choice' is made is not seriously considered.

Nonetheless, strong elements of deliberative democratic praxis were to be found in the contributions of many of the research participants in this study. Some argued strongly in favour of a social mode of learning, which brings them in contact with other people and cultures in the museum. Research participants discussed the merits of visiting museums and galleries together with family and friends; they stressed the need for the inclusion of ordinary peoples' stories in the museums and the collaborative mounting of exhibitions with diverse communities. Most of them talked about the significance of human interaction and dialogue in the galleries, rather than the use of technology and interactive exhibits. They often used the notion of class to elaborate on their ideas about education in the museum and explain their dislike for some displays. They were keen on discussing exhibitions in a critical frame of mind, unwilling to accept the legitimacy of power and discrimination against cultures and histories that might have been ordinary, but which, they felt, were uniquely theirs.

Similarly, museum educators in all three organisations appeared to sometimes be translating the increased emphasis on learning in the museum, into their own different ways of responding to the local and institutional perceptions. This study revealed a multiplicity of ways that museums and galleries in Dundee have turned the

new dominant learning discourses into meaningful educational opportunities for the people of the city. These instances of real engagement of the public with exhibitions were characterised by both museum staff and visitors as the sort of educational opportunity that has been fostered by working *in* and *against* the dominant versions of museum education theory and practice.

Nonetheless, how does the ‘in and against’ argument of the 1970s fit into the new world of global markets and the changed nature of the state and public sector organisations? Workers in a diversity of institutions, from the health sector to universities and from local government to the media, find it increasingly hard to secure their professional autonomy and use their positions in order to ‘de-authorize’ the authority of the institutions that employ them. The audit culture (Strathern, 2000) and the politics of numbers (Rose, 1999) might have improved transparency and performance, but have diminished the professional freedom to subvert hegemonic trends.

In general, the study’s findings revealed the need for further research, which might attempt to conceptualise and test some of the participants’ alternative, often oppositional, ideas about museum education for adults in practice. Bauman (1999), on the one hand, ‘in search of politics’ and Martin (2001), on the other, in search of the adult education tradition, both stress the need to re-constitute the *agora*, the interface of the private and the public sphere, a site of dialogue and collaboration, but also of tension and struggle. Visitors come to the museum as knowing subjects, not *tabulae rasae*. They have shared interests, problems and hopes and can work collectively to achieve common understandings. This is what used to constitute the heart of radical adult education: offering citizens the space and pedagogical means to meet, talk and learn from each others’ experiences. In an era when adult educators face the dominance of lifelong (l)earning (Edwards, 1999) at the expense of adult education, museums can become the spaces where more radical forms of education can still be pursued.

This will require not counting visitors, but instead making visitors count (Lumley, 1988): the balance of power in museum ‘audiences’ can only be shifted by redistributing the power of knowledge. Museum educators need to work ‘in and against’ the institutions that employ them, in order to establish a model of education that will foster critical thinking and the shared ownership of cultures and histories. This entails re-distributing control of what counts as knowledge and education, as a matter of principle with the visitors themselves, rather than adjusting museum work to the market and government agendas, as a matter of course.

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